The thunder of artillery became louder every moment. Suddenly the road left the forest and entered a broad open meadow. Shells were falling right and left and the road was pitted in many places. The chauffeur turned to me and asked, "What do you order, Comrade Commissar? Turn back, stop, or step on the gas?"

"Step on it!" I shouted.

Soon we reached Stript. Not a living soul in the hamlet. A few houses were ablaze. The house in which the 43rd Corps had had its quarters had been abandoned in a hurry, its floor littered with papers, a broken field telephone on the porch. I heard the tune of the *Marseillaise:* a Lettish battalion was marching to the front. Its commander showed me the written order: "To proceed to the village Walden; to occupy the hills next to the village, right of the road, and attack the enemy when he approaches." Half an hour later I found the 43rd Corps—General Boldyrev, his chief of staff General Simonov, a handful of staff officers, communications service men, and messengers with saddled horses. All was in good order, but the corps had no word from the 186th Division. All efforts to restore communication with it had failed. It looked as if the entire division had vanished into thin air. The regiments on each side of its position reported that the Germans had established a pontoon bridge and had begun to cross the river. About noon they had moved a few pieces of light artillery to the right bank, but our scouts had not yet located them.

Boldyrev remained confident. "A river," he explained, "is not a serious obstacle to a party with superior firepower. The pocket is not large. Now we will counterattack." He sent stern orders to local commanders. The latter reported that the morale of their troops was good and that the officers had perfect co-operation from the soldiers' committees. But there was no report on the progress of the counterattack.

General Simonov said to me, "This happens. Communication never works when you need it most."

Then the reports began to arrive. Some units ordered to advance had occupied assigned positions but met no enemy; others had to change positions because their flanks were not protected; still others had been forced to retreat under German pressure or were ready to retreat because of lack of artillery support. Some reports were very dramatic: hurricane fire, tremendous losses, heroic valor of the troops. Boldyrev doggedly sent orders to outfits in reserve. Simonov was absorbed with the maps. Then he reported, "The pocket is no larger than five miles by three, but we have no continuous line of defense. The Germans could be here at any moment."

Headquarters was moved some five miles east. By dusk it became clear that the counteroffensive had failed. All orders had been obeyed, but the troops lacked the cohesion and initiative needed to stop the

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